

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Exodus 17:8-13

The Book of Exodus (the word “exodus” means “departure”) is the second book in the five books of the Law (the Torah). This book tells of the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt, the birth and education of Moses and his flight into the land of Midian, his encounter with God on Mount Sinai (Horeb) (the burning bush), Moses’ return to Egypt and pleadings with Pharaoh, the plagues of Egypt, the institution of the Passover, the passing through the Red Sea, the giving of the ten commandments at Mt. Sinai, the golden calf, and the forty years of wandering in the desert.

The time between the crossing through the Red Sea and the arrival of the Israelites at Mount Sinai was three months. It was during this three month period that the people complained that they were thirsty. God commanded Moses to speak to a rock (he struck it with his staff) and water flowed from it for the people to drink. Jewish oral tradition must have held that this rock followed the Jews in their forty year wandering because no such event is mentioned in the Old Testament. 1st Corinthians 10:4 however does record this “following rock”. How different this epistle might have been if Saint Paul had said “If it isn’t written in Scripture I won’t believe it.”

Our reading today occurs immediately after the rock story and explains why we (priests and charismatics at least) pray with arms outstretched.

⁸ [In those days] [], Amalek came

Amalek is not a person, but a nomadic tribe listed in the genealogy of Esau (Genesis 36:12). Just as Jacob fought with Esau, so their descendants are destined to fight. The Amalekites controlled the caravan routes between Egypt and Arabia.

and waged war against Israel.

This is the first military activity of the newly freed Hebrews.

⁹ Moses, therefore, said to Joshua,

This is the first mention of Joshua in sacred Scripture. It is Joshua who is later designated to lead the Israelites into the promised land.

“Pick out certain men, and tomorrow go out and engage Amalek in battle. I will be standing on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”

This requires faith (and acting on it) on the part of Joshua. Joshua will be fighting while Moses looks on.

¹⁰ So Joshua did as Moses told him: he engaged Amalek in battle after Moses had climbed to the top of the hill with Aaron

Moses' brother – later to become High Priest.

and Hur.

A contemporary of Moses who later governs the Israelites with Aaron when Moses is absent. It is strange that a man so prominent in the early traditions of the exodus should disappear without a trace.

¹¹ As long as Moses kept his hands raised up, Israel had the better of the fight, but when he let his hands rest, Amalek had the better of the fight. ¹² Moses' hands, however, grew tired;

Yahweh fights for Israel only when Moses' hands are raised. This establishes Moses as a sort of mediator-Christ figure.

so they put a rock in place for him to sit on. Meanwhile Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other, so that his hands remained steady till sunset.

Even though Moses is the mediator between God and the Hebrews, he requires support from the people. This shows our responsibility to support our Pope, bishops and priests.

¹³ And Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

2nd Reading - 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2

Remember that Timothy is bishop of Ephesus. This bishop has encountered some difficulties and Paul now addresses this letter to him as pastor of his congregation. He invites Timothy to transmit his teaching to faithful men, urges him to fight as a soldier of Christ, anxious only to please his Master, to strive as the athlete who aspires to victory, and to labor as the husbandman who prepares for an abundant harvest. He is ever to keep in mind the sufferings of Christ, so that he may become a partaker in His immortal life and reign with Him. He is to remember Paul's example as to how to live out the life of Christ.

¹⁴ [R]emain faithful to what you have learned and believed, because you know from whom you learned it,

Stand fast. As opposed to the false teachers who lead astray.

¹⁵ and that from infancy you have known

Timothy is taught not only by Paul, but also by his family. Jewish parents were obliged to see that their children were instructed in the Law when they reached the age of five.

(the) sacred scriptures,

The Old Testament; the New Testament hasn't been written yet and books which compose it won't be decided upon for another roughly 350 years.

which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

The true instruction of the Old Testament can be understood when read in the context of the Christian community.

¹⁶ All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

A couple of points can be made here: (1) The author probably can't imagine any Scripture texts which aren't inspired (literally, God breathed). (2) The text doesn't say only scripture is useful. God provides a super-abundance, not just the bare necessity. Sacred Tradition is also useful for the same purposes accorded to Scripture here. Like what was evidenced in our introduction to the first reading, some New Testament Traditions are not written in Scripture (the assumption of Mary and the immaculate conception are two examples). When you are asked "where in the Bible does it say . . ." you can answer "where in the Bible does it say not to . . ." In fact, 2 Thessalonians 2:15 says otherwise.

"Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word or by our letter' (2 Thessalonians 2:15). From this it is clear that they did not hand down everything by letter, but there was much also that was not written. Like that which was written, the unwritten too is worthy of belief. So let us regard the tradition of the Church also as worthy of belief. Is it a tradition? Seek no further." [Saint John Chrysostom (between A.D. 398-404), *Homilies on the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians* 4,2

Tripod of Truth

[3-legged milking stool]
(credit: Dr. Alan Schreck)

God's Revealed Truth

Sacred
Scripture

Sacred
Tradition

Church
Magisterium

^{4:1} I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus,

Paul calls upon two witnesses: God and Jesus. Deuteronomy 17:6 requires two witnesses in a life and death situation.

who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingly power: ² proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching.

Paul urges Timothy to be zealous, taking advantage of every opportunity to preach. This is unusual since the ancients commonly urged speech only when it would be “timely.” God is the one who keeps the timetable and the word of God is always in season.

“Let it always be your season, not merely in peace and security and when sitting in church.” [Saint John Chrysostom (between A.D. 393-397), *Homilies on the Second Epistle to Timothy* 9]

Gospel - Luke 18:1-8

This week we hear the first of two parables on prayer (we will hear the second one next week). The question has often been put to Jesus “When and how will the end come?” Jesus always answered that we are to persevere in humility so that we will always be ready.

18:1 Then he [Jesus] told them a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary.

As the last verse in this reading makes clear, mere continual prayer is not what He is talking about, but fidelity to God must be the motivator of this prayer.

He said, ² “There was a judge in a certain town who neither feared God nor respected any human being. ³ And a widow

A woman who has lost her male agency in a patriarchal society was powerless.

in that town used to come to him

The woman has faith that justice will be done and is therefore persistent. We need to remain firm in our faith: faith and prayer go hand in hand.

and say, ‘Render a just decision for me against my adversary.’

Probably a rich, influential man. The widow was too poor to bribe either the judge or his assistant and these officials did not wish to alienate important citizens.

⁴ For a long time the judge was unwilling, but eventually he thought, ‘While it is true that I neither fear God nor respect any human being, ⁵ because this widow keeps bothering me I shall deliver a just decision for her lest she finally come and strike me.’” ⁶ The Lord said, “Pay attention to what the dishonest judge says.

Two lessons are drawn via the argument from the lesser to the greater: (1) If the persistent pleading of the helpless widow is fruitful, how much more will the persistent praying of Christian disciples achieve? (2) If an unjust judge yields to the pleadings of a widow, how much will a gracious God?

⁷ Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them? ⁸ I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily. But when the Son of Man comes,

The parousia may be long in coming, but it will come surely, speedily, and in a completely unexpected way.

will he find faith on earth?"

The question is not about God's vindication of God's persecuted community; God will vindicate them. The question is whether Jesus' disciples will remain faithful to Him during the long haul caused by the delay of His return.

Our Lord has promised His Church that it will remain true to its mission until the end of time (Matthew 28:20); the Church, therefore, cannot go off the path of the true faith. But not everyone will remain faithful: some will turn their backs on the faith of their own accord. We must stay watchful and persevere in the faith and in prayer even though people around us fall away.